

II. Current Military Forces and Strategy, Negotiate Victory.

A. Beliefs of Advocates

1. Group A beliefs.
2. Current levels of U.S. troops, costs, and casualties -- at least for the time required to win DRV acceptance of US/GVN victory (variously estimated: from few months to 3-4 years) -- are acceptable domestically in the U.S., and justified by international advantages of victory.
3. Viet Cong/North Vietnam cannot carry out or will not accept costs of major offensive to increase U.S. casualties or produce dramatic setbacks to U.S./GVN effort, within next 18 months.
4. Although RVNAF improvement is marked, it cannot justify sizeable U.S. troop reductions in next 12-18 months. "Streamlining" to extent of 50,000 troops might be possible, though even this might have undesirable psychological effects on boyh GVN and Hanoi.
5. Preferable to keep up current military pressure till assured, verified victory conditions achieved, than to accept prior cease-fire, deescalation, or major U.S. reduction in forces (even if accompanied by NVA withdrawals).

B. Military Actions:

1. Maintain present U.S. force level.
Modification: Reduce U.S. forces by limited amount -- 50-75,000 -- designed and declared to be merely "streamlining," with no effect on combat role or strength.
2. Continue current military operations: i.e., emphasis on defense of Saigon and other cities; multi-battalion sweeps and cordons; increasing U.S. artillery and air support to RVNAF, and reequipping of RVNAF; military/police efforts against VCI.

C. Paris:

1. Let GVN take lead in negotiations.
2. Insist on victory, conditions, i.e., withdrawal of all Communist forces and opponents except individuals reconciled to current GVN.
3. Until convinced of DRV/VVC intent to abide by victory terms, avoid ceasefire, deescalation, and withdrawals.

D. GVN.

1. Avoid destabilizing pressures on GVN to "reform or broaden base; continue law by encouragement toward these.
2. Assure GVN of continued support and large-scale U.S. military presence till victory assured.
3. Discourage GVN/NLF talks or accession to power of Vietnam elements inclined to major compromise.

E. Costs.

1. Financial costs continue at current rate of \$30 billion per years.
2. Viet Cong can continue to impose 200 U.S. casualties a week.
(If willing to accept higher casualties themselves, VC/NVA could impose much higher loss-rate on U.S.)
3. If 50,000 noncombat troops removed, costs reduced by_____.

F. Consequences.

1. Most proponents now predict "victory" achieved in South Vietnam within 18-24 months, with or without explicit settlement with DRV; a few believe conditions already substantially achieved, settlement possible almost immediately. Some who accept assumptions above believe victory attainable but will take 3-5 years (some of these still prefer this option, some prefer escalation for quicker win, others some form of compromise).
2. But others (Group B) reject all beliefs above and believe "victory" unlikely short of 5 years, or possibly ever, by this approach.

3. Most Group B members would sharply question whether current costs were acceptable to the U.S. public over three or more years, even if victory resulted (which Group B does not expect), and especially if "progress" were slow and ambiguous. And they doubt public would expect great progress, so that new Administration would be widely criticized, meanwhile, for "more of the same."
4. Risks:
 - (a) If VC/NVA launch damaging large-scale offensive -- even at high costs -- most of above assumptions would be dramatically refuted, leaving new Administration with a "Credibility Gap" comparable to predecessor's.
 - (b) If situation is not irreversibly improved, with victory demonstrably near, in 12-18 months, it will have become "Nixon's War," with same bureaucratic/political/diplomatic pressures to persist further as in previous Administration. If meanwhile DRV had made plausible compromise offers, Administration would be condemned for throwing away opportunities -- uniquely available to it while still unencumbered by prior involvement -- to end conflict.
5. If victory conditions are achieved in 12-18 months, considerable vindication (far from total) of U.S. war policies since 1965. Confidence in U.S. judgment and competence somewhat restored, as expectations of domestic and international critics confounded (though total costs still strongly questioned.) Increased

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confidence in SEA leaders in continued U.S. support. Perhaps less tendency in some (Thailand?) to change policies in ways that would reduce vulnerability to subversion.

6. Subsequent DRV pressure on Laos -- and DR V and Chicom support of insurgency in Thailand -- uncertain. In wake of setback in SVN, this might either increase or decrease.

7. The GVN and Political Evolution

The GVN seems to be more stable than at any time during the last four years. In the interests of replacing or counterbalancing Ky's influence (and perhaps under pressure of the onset of talks) Thieu has broadened his cabinet base to include more Southerners and some respected nationalists -- most notably, Premier Tran Van Huong. And he has backed Huong's drive to replace corrupt officials (with, by and large, Thieu supporters, though most seem to represent improvement). For the first time in years, representative institutions exist, at both national and local levels. These are moves, at last, in the right direction in the political struggle with the Communists.

Yet the coalescence of support for the GVN still mainly involves the more conservative, landowning or merchant groups, and the educated elites formerly close to the French administration. These elements, along with refugees from the North and GVN/ARVN officials with most to protect from Communist takeover, tend to be the most uncompromising anti-Communists. But it is questionable whether their leaders alone have either (a) the ability to mobilize the loyalties and efforts of enough of the non-Communist majority of the nation to confront effectively either the military or political efforts of the Communist apparatus, during or after hostilities, or (b) the will to talk directly with the NLF to seek any form of compromise settlement. In blunt terms: they do not engage either the trust or the self-interest (e.g., aspirations for social mobility or higher income) of the mass even of the non-Communist population; and they do not really want the war to end.

A further evolution of the government makeup and base of support, to include more non-Communist groups with organized rural roots like the various Hoa Hao and Cao Dai sects and the Montagnard "nationalists", and those with urban organization like the Buddhist associations, the Chinese and the unions, could serve both these purposes. Both are in U.S. interests. A broader GVN promises more

Vietnamese initiative towards ending the war. And greater cohesion of a broad range of non-Communist elements offers the only hope (a significant hope, if it can be achieved) of reducing the risk or even of postponing or cushioning an eventual Communist takeover if a compromise ends hostilities.

Yet one of the most unsuccessful aspects of our efforts has been getting the GVN to do virtually anything that it did not want to do, and it usually did not want to do anything that would in any serious way affect its own current distribution of power. We have gone to the GVN with small and large shopping lists for change and improvement. We have applied pressure and we have been kind and gentle. No combination of these tactics has proven successful. GVN tactics have been to resist us for a while, then when some pressure is applied, to agree in principle, and then to take little or no action. One explanation for the GVN's unresponsiveness is probably its belief that we would not invoke sanctions against them. If this has been their judgment, it has proven correct. The argument is invariably made, and there is undoubtedly truth to it, that we should not judge them by our standards or expect too much of them. This wise judgment, however, has been used to justify U.S. inaction rather than action with judiciousness.

8. The Domino Theory

Ever since the early 1950s U.S. policy has been based on the domino theory, either tacitly or explicitly. After a great deal of waffling and argumentation, the intelligence community has finally come to the judgment that the domino theory has very little validity under current circumstances, and that even with an adverse outcome in Vietnam the fate of Southeast Asia will be determined much more by what the countries of this region themselves do in their own behalf than on a communist threat per se. NIE 1-68 of 6 June 1968 states the position:

"29. Assuming a negotiation in Vietnam which leaves the Communist apparatus and the non-Communist political forces intact but no longer in active combat, the situation in Vietnam and Laos would probably be indecisive for some time. Subversion in Cambodia and Thailand would continue, but could probably be contained. Elsewhere in Southeast Asia -- in Burma, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and the Philippines -- governments would confront the continuing and intractable problems of economic development and of nation-building; these would provide issues and situations susceptible of exploitation by forces wishing to unseat or subvert the existing regimes. By and large, the governments would probably get the better of it. Even if Vietnam fell fairly soon into the hands of a regime dominated by the Communists, the other regimes would probably not collapse, but their struggle for existence would become more intense and their survival more precarious. They have assets South Vietnam has never had, namely, relative peace, some sense of nationhood, and real successes against Communist subversion."

NIE 50-68 of 14 November 1968 develops this thesis more fully. Confirming the anti-domino judgment with respect to Vietnam, this NIE argues that it is Laos (once again!) rather than Vietnam which will have a much greater impact on the future of the area.